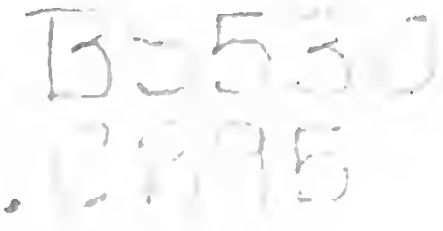

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SIXTEENTH THOUSAND

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HEART CHORDS.

MY BIBLE.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

IT is one of the misfortunes of our age that we have so little leisure. The haste of life brings many disadvantages: it hinders thoroughness of work; it destroys largely our reverence for life, since we hardly cherish much respect for that which we do hurriedly. The result is that the world is full of hasty judgments: men are driven to decide almost before they have had leisure to deliberate. The spirit of this haste is infectious: people ask for rapid conclusions; they become impatient of a wise hesitation; the demand brings the supply. On all sides dog-

matic utterances are heard; a swift survey is made; a few facts are gathered; an immature conclusion is reached, and immediately announced; oracle succeeds oracle, contradicting or confirming; those who counsel deliberation are elbowed out of the way. In the multitude of oracles there is confusion. Men grow bewildered; they drift to one side or the other, having lost their vantage ground of calm observation. Such a state of things is hardly helpful to truth. What is wanted is quiet thought. Out of it may come clearer views, better methods of study, and the reverent spirit which is essential to the discovery of truth. God reveals nothing to the hasty: the calm waters best reflect the stars.

In this little book I plead for patience in the study of the Bible. No study is likely to result in enduring knowledge which is carried on with an impatient spirit. Yet we are tempted, perhaps, to be more recklessly rapid in deciding upon questions affecting the interpretation of the Bible than in any other study. I will not dwell upon

the harm that is done by the misinterpretations which are piously adopted and accepted as infallible; these are a source of sadness to all thoughtful readers of the Bible. But it is well to remember that there is a reflexive mischief in such hasty methods. The character suffers; the habit of mind which contents itself with surface interpretations and rapid conclusions undermines the moral tone; self-opinionatedness is developed, and the character becomes inflated with egotism and conceit. He who would not merely use the Bible as a book of interesting studies, but as a help to devotion and as a spiritual instrument in the formation of character, will seek to adopt those habits of patience, reverence for truth, and earnest exercise of all his intelligent faculties, that he may avoid the snares of that

"Raw haste, half-sister to delay."

The natives of India had a saying about Sir Henry Lawrence—"When Sir Henry looked up twice to heaven and once down to earth, and

then stroked his beard, he knew what to do." If we may utilise the saying, it seems to express the attitude of mind with which all life's work and study should be done. The reverence which looks up, and the observation which looks around, combined with the judgment that can reflect, become safeguards against the falsehood of extremes. There is an observation which is keen enough, but which, never looking upward, has no reverence; there is a pious reverence which, in its rapt heavenward gaze, forgets to look earthward, and so loses touch with humanity; but he who, while regarding heaven, does not forget the world in which he lives, and seeks to know also the man within, will avoid alike the dogmatism which is irreverent and the mysticism which is unpractical.

What, therefore, is needed for true Bible knowledge is clear thinking and reverent feeling, allied with that patience which can wait till the careful, systematic, and intelligent study has brought forth its legitimate fruit of truer (and, because truer, firmer) conceptions of the real

meaning, purpose, and use of the Bible. There is more need of this perhaps than many people think. Christian faith is placed, as it were, between cross-fires. Religious enthusiasm is alive, and the faults which wait upon enthusiasm—inaccuracy, the violent application of the Bible texts to any idea uppermost in the zealot's mind, the readiness to accuse the more cautious of selfish Laodiceanism—are not far to seek. While on the other side we are told that the Bible as a religious or moral factor is played out ; that criticism and science, advanced knowledge and wider inquiry, have stripped away its glory, and cast the crown of its spiritual supremacy down to the ground. The result is just what might be expected : one-sided men become more and more dogmatic ; thoughtful men grow silent through a creditable timidity ; while the great multitude of those who are neither experts nor fanatics nor trained thinkers drift on with ever-increasing confusion of thought and painful misgiving. Want of knowledge is one source of doubt ; another is the

difficulty of getting rid of faulty notions, which unthinking and reckless spirits declare to be inseparable from true and genuine belief in the teaching and authority of the Bible.

If, then, it can be shown that the Bible is not responsible for the faulty notions of men about its nature and contents; that there are many pious opinions which have their origin in devout fancies and not in any fair and candid interpretation of the Bible; that the wider the survey we take of the range and drift of the Bible, the more does it harmonise with the truest conceptions of the world's history, and the more adequately does it meet men's needs, we shall be able to study it with simpler trust in the God who of old time spake unto the fathers in the prophets.

To do this it seems essential that we should try and lay aside preconceptions and prejudices. We have perhaps expected from the Bible much that we had no right to expect. We have perhaps been selfish, thinking that the Bible was only designed to minister to ourselves, and

forgetting that in that treasury there are things old as well as new, and that there are portions which were primarily designed to nourish the spirits of men in other ages and other climes than our own. We have perhaps thought that the full and proportionate Bible as we now have it is the same as the more limited and meagre Bible which was in the hands of Hezekiah and David, of Samuel or Moses. Many of these thoughts must be laid aside. We need to ask afresh—"What is the Bible? What is the time-range of its growth? What is the drift of its various portions? What is the purpose and significance of the whole? Where did it grow? How can we trace its formation? How may we most intelligently study it? How may we best meet the difficulties which surround its teaching and its history?

It will be impossible to answer all these questions; but it is well to remember that they should be asked, and that, if we are really in earnest in our wish to study this old book, which has rejoiced the hearts of thousands in

past centuries, we must not shrink from the labour which the answers to such questions involve, but seriously, candidly, patiently seek for every light upon our path of study. All that can be attempted in these pages will be to consider some of the difficulties which may stand in the way, briefly to suggest some of the leading principles which should guide our study, trace out in the simplest way some points in the history of the growth of the Bible, and to suggest some method by which the Bible may be most wisely and intelligently studied. If we can but honestly and simply do this, we may trust to be illumined by Him, the breath of whose Spirit has in all ages given men wisdom.

CHAPTER II.

THE BIBLE A POWER.

THERE can be no doubt that many people are greatly perplexed in their thoughts about the Bible. They hardly know why it is, but they are conscious of a confusion in their minds on the subject. If we were to ask them for their views about the Bible, they would probably answer, We have no views at all on the matter. There was a time when we thought of the Bible very differently : we felt quite sure that it was a true and unerring guide to immortality and life ; we read it as we would a travelling companion, seeking from it how to shape our life here, and how to raise our hopes and trust for the hereafter. But now we scarcely know what to think. We hardly know whether we ought to trust it at all ; for we hear that its history is not dependable ; the account it gives of the origin of the world is, we are told, contradicted by science.

Then the drift of thought in the present day seems to make a great deal of the Bible only superfluous. All this makes us doubt how we ought to receive the Bible. But this is not all. We thought, at any rate, that we were quite safe in taking the Bible to be a guide of our life, to show us the best way to rule our conduct, and the best type after which to mould our character. But even this we are now not sure of; for there is so much in the Bible that shocks our sense of what is right, and the characters which have been formed in those who have professed to believe in the Bible have been so hard or so flabby, so bitter or so mawkish, so full of cruel bigotry or so wanting in true manliness, that we have lost our faith even in its power to rear a true, high type of manhood. Then, again, we are not at all easy about the teaching of the Bible. Its theology seems in many respects tinged with superstitionism, and there is a strange, malevolent tone about some of the tenets of Christendom. All this we feel, and at the same time we are quite ready to confess

that the Bible charms us still. It has a persuasive force, which has often, like a mother's voice, kept us from doing wrong; it has an elevated tone, which makes us scorn base and mean ways; and it certainly searches out our spirits, and causes us to feel ashamed of ourselves; and it seems to spread over our life the wide-reaching care of One greater than man, and makes us feel happy in the thought that there is some One in the universe who loves us with a pure, honest, and painstaking love. When we think of these things, we can only say that we are confused; we wish all the doubts would not arise to spoil our enjoyment of the noble and good things that the Bible brings us, and yet we cannot endure to enjoy a comfort which may be ignoble, because resting on what is empty or false. We feel, in fact, towards the Bible as men do towards a friend who is under a cloud. A distrust has been created, but the old tenderness remains. There was a time when we looked up to our friend as an oracle: what he said we unquestioningly

believed; what he counselled we unhesitatingly did. But now it is different. There is a cloud: we cannot give him an undoubting allegiance and rely upon his judgment as before; yet we are filled with regret, for our fondness for him remains, though now strangely mingled with distrust. So with the Bible. Once we read its words without a doubt or misgiving: it was our oracle; it was more precious than rubies; it was sweeter than honey; it was the light of our feet. But now it is different: a cloud of doubt surrounds it; our fondness remains, but distrust is mixed with it.

The remedy is simple. Deal with the Bible as chivalrous friendship would deal with a friend: face the facts; see what has caused the cloud; ask whether the distrust is justifiable; whether it arises from the actions of our friend, or from our own mistake, and, perhaps, from our having too readily believed what others have told us of him.

And it may, I think, fairly be pleaded that the Bible is entitled to this straightforward treat-

ment. Whatever little shadow seems to rest upon it now, at least in the past it has done good service. Let me suggest that the most superficial survey of the past power and influence of the Bible raises at least a presumption that it is possessed of some deep and strong moral and spiritual force.

The power of a work may be measured by the length of its life and the width of its influence. The great rivers of the world are valuable in proportion to the mileage and navigability of their course. It is not otherwise with books. A work that lives on and feeds the thoughts of men as the centuries move, attests its greatness by its vitality and its force. Constant and inexhaustible as the Amazon or the Danube, they pour forth their fulness ceaselessly: the ages pass; generations die; fresh faces throng on every side; fresh voices are heard in the world; but great works still contribute their share of vigour and health to the thought of human kind.

The comparison is not adequate; it wrongs

the great writings of the world. In one thing they are greater than the water-courses of the earth. They can pour their wealth of influence through every land. While the Arno and the Po carry fertility only through the plains and valleys of Lombardy, the heart-inspiring wisdom of the wise can travel everywhere. "Their sound goes forth into all lands, and their words to the ends of the world." But there are books and books. Some are as a river that flows with ever feebler and scantier course; others are as the river which Ezekiel saw, which grew deeper and broader in an ever-lengthening course. Out of this springs a test. The ages try the works of men: the wisdom and strength of some grow even more and more apparent as time goes on; others are popular for a while, and then forgotten. There is the book of a season, but there is also the book of an age; and there are a few books which are not for an age even, but for all time. The judgment of centuries has measured these; the verdict of generations has been given; if experience is

worth anything, there is no appeal from this verdict; these works have been enthroned; their writers wield a sceptre and rule over an empire which kings might envy. Homer, Dante, Shakespeare sway a realm greater than that of the Pharaohs; and, to use the language of Victor Hugo, "Tacitus with iron heel treads under foot the twelve dragons whom we call the Cæsars."

Measured by this test of time and place, the Bible is one of the great books of the world. It may be said that the Bible is not a book so much as a collection of works bound together in one volume. We need not object to this description. The Bible, as we call it, is not so much a book as a collection of literature. But in this consists an element of wonder.

The volume contains the relics of the literature of the Hebrew people. The Holy Land is not larger than the southern counties of England; its political or commercial importance can hardly be said to have been very great or extensive; it had, indeed, its epoch

of splendour ; but, in comparison with the first-class empires of the world, it was of no more consequence than Holland or Belgium among the great nations of Europe. Yet its literature is better known than any literature of the world ; and this volume, which contains the history, the poetry, the moral philosophy, and the religious treatises—the prayer-book and hymn-book of its people—is more widely circulated than any other volume. What is more, it is regarded with a reverence and affection almost unique. People who seldom read it, and who never attempted to study it, are happy if they have even a dusty copy of it in the house : they like to carry it about with them ; they enrol the names of their children upon its first blank page. Intelligent and educated people acknowledge its charm ; more scholars comment on the significance of its words, or the true readings of its text, than upon the writings of Homer and Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Lucan, and Dante, that learned band of six, the renown of whose great names "echoes through the world." The notion

that a valuable MS. of any portion of its text has been found excites the curiosity of the whole civilised world: the pretended discoverer of it values the treasure at a million of money; a fresh translation of it is awaited with eager and kindling interest; when it appears, the first day's sale exceeds a million. Millions of children are taught lessons from its pages; its teachings have entered into the warp and woof of the national life of the greatest of peoples. Men and women on both sides of the Atlantic are unconsciously under the influence of its moral and spiritual suggestions. Portions of it have a charm of inexpressible influence, which sways the art as well as the morals of human life. Its words have been hid in the best hearts of humanity, and have moulded the noblest examples of life and the highest types of human character.

It is undoubtedly true that the volume has been assailed, as a whole and in detail. Its history has been declared to be faulty: its scientific conceptions crude and beneath con-

tempt ; its moral ideas harsh and incongruous. Its most reverent admirers need not deny the fact that such accusations have been made. But all this only adds to the interest of the book. In depth and breadth, and in the enduring character of its influence, it is unsurpassed, notwithstanding all that has been said of its inaccuracy and blundering. Our interest rises. The spell which its words have cast round men must be mighty indeed which can endure and triumph after so many conflicts. It is like a splendid minster which the critics find fault with, but which all the world still flocks to see, and within whose walls thousands still love to worship, and whose calming and elevating influence lifts tried and tempted souls high above sordid motives and low-thoughted care.

It is worth while taking up such a book again, and endeavouring to estimate the reasons for the hold it has gained upon the world. We may, for the moment, grant everything that can be said to disparage it ; but the fact still remains

that its influence has been deep and far-reaching, that it is one of the few volumes which has won an ascendancy wide as the world and lasting as the centuries. Even were every divine feature to disappear from its pages, it would not be an unworthy study to examine its teachings and try to discover something of the reason for the tenacity of its hold upon the minds of men. But if we take what we may term a higher view, and see in it the unfolding of ever wider and deeper conceptions of God and of God's government, we may find that its drift and its purpose touch humanity in its breadth and length and depth, ministering some hope to all races, some truth to every age, and finding its way to give comfort and courage to the hearts and spirits of millions.

CHAPTER III.

THE BIBLE AND SCIENCE.

THE uneasy feeling of which we have spoken is felt towards the Bible because it is believed that scientific knowledge has discredited some portions of it. The Bible gives, it has been said, an utterly mistaken account of the formation of the world. I do not know what some people may feel, but I firmly believe that thousands are just weary of the perpetual recurrence to this threshed-out subject. Yet it may be that some feel that difficulties exist, and allow the prejudice which results from this feeling still to hinder their taking to the serious study of the Bible.

For such we may be allowed to illustrate briefly three points :—

(1) That it the Bible should be ten thousand times more at variance with science than it is believed to be by some, it would not be of the slightest moment. It is one of those confusions

of the mind which have been created by the blunder-headedness of partisans on both sides.

It is a very simple and fair principle to lay down, that an error incidental is very different from an error essential. Let me illustrate. A judge is summing up a difficult case. In order to make his charge clear to the jury, he makes use, we will suppose, of some chemical or agricultural illustration, or he quotes a piece of poetry. His quotation, which he says is from Pope, is from Dryden. His illustration from agriculture shows that he has no knowledge of farming ; his language betrays that he is totally ignorant of some remarkable chemical discoveries. He has made, in fact, mistakes in literature and science. But these mistakes do not invalidate his forensic argument ; they are completely separable from the drift and scope of his charge ; they are incidental, not essential ; they have been used for a purpose, viz., to enliven and to enlighten : they have served this purpose ; the jurymen are able by their means to catch more readily the gist of his argument.

The judge is not a whit less capable as a judge, because he has shown that his scientific knowledge is defective. Or a doctor visits a patient; to relieve his visit of its mere technical character, he describes the patient's symptoms and treatment in an illustrative way: he blunders sadly; he shows that his knowledge of history is by no means perfect, and in the sphere from which his illustrations are drawn, he exhibits perhaps a dozen inaccuracies. But the faultiness of his illustrations, the feebleness of his historical attainments, does not in the least interfere with the soundness of his views or the patient's condition, nor even with the clearness of his account of them. The mind of the listener, unless he be a captious literalist, readily separates between the incidental blunders and the essential drift of the statement.

Numberless illustrations of the same principle will occur to the mind. The mistakes in astronomy which might be found in Herodotus or Thucydides would not be taken of themselves to invalidate the history; geographical errors in

Dante do not make the poem less splendid, or deprive it of its vast and deep spiritual teaching; the purpose of these writers lies outside the incidental errors. Had Thucydides or Herodotus or Dante professed to write on astronomy or geology, the case would have been different; error there would have been error in the essential intention of the book, but error in the subordinate or incidental features does not detract from their essential value or beauty. It is a recognised principle that a passing dictum of a judge on a point not before the court carries no weight, and is not to be quoted as authoritative, however authoritative the form of it may be. This is only reasonable, for the judgment is governed by the case, and is not held to be applicable to any side issue.

To apply this is simple; it warns us that scientific error does not deprive of its value a book whose whole purpose and drift is moral and spiritual, not scientific. It warns us that to criticise incidental or real inaccuracies is impossible or unfair till we have mastered the purpose

of the writer, or the points which he designs to illustrate and enforce.

But it will be said the Bible is inspired, and we look to its inspiration to be free from all possible mistakes. What is the use of a book which pretends to be inspired if we are to meet in it with blunders and inaccuracies? It is its very claim to inspiration which makes us expect it to be without flaw or frailty, blemish or blot. Are we quite sure that this is the case? Are we perfectly certain that a mechanical accuracy of language is essential to true inspiration? A little reflection will, if I mistake not, convince us that it is not so essential.

Suppose, for example, that we were to say of some statesman that he was sagacious, would we be understood to mean that he was a fit person to consult if we were suffering from gout? Does sagacity in statesmanship carry with it skill in medicine? All that we mean is that in matters of government and policy such a man is possessed of sound judgment and apt capacity. In other words, when we pre-

dicate sagacity of the statesman, we mean sagacity in the particular line and walk of political affairs. We do not mean that there is not another sagacity for different affairs which the statesman may or may not possess. All that we are speaking of is his sagacity in a certain direction.

Now, there is no more inclusiveness of sense in the word inspiration than there is in the word sagacity. Just as there may be a sagacity for politics, and a sagacity for commercial matters, and a sagacity for medical treatment, so there may be an inspiration which endows a man with fitness for government, or an inspiration which endows a man with the power of argument, or an inspiration which bestows upon a man the gift of song. It is perfectly true that the general feeling of Christendom has distinguished between the inspiration of the sacred writers and the inspiration of the poet or the man of scientific genius. This is right enough; for their inspiration is of a different order, and for different purpose, though from the same

Spirit, who gives to some the word of wisdom, to others the gift of knowledge, to others the gift of faith. But it still remains true that inspiration to a particular work does not guarantee a kind of universal infallibility. We should no more expect scientific infallibility, for example, in prophets and apostles than we should expect medical sagacity in a man whose gift of sagacity lay in a political sphere.

To say, then, we have found out that Moses made geological or astronomical blunders is not in the least to discover any flaw in his inspiration. To say that an evangelist confused two places together, or that an apostle betrayed ignorance of some point in ancient history, may be true or not true, but it is completely beside the question of their inspiration, which simply seems to me to mean divine spiritual help given in certain direction, the direction in their case being to tell or to enforce moral and spiritual truths among men.

What we have reached, then, amounts to this —that mistakes and inaccuracies, if such there

be, in matters not within the scope and drift of the sacred writer's intentions, do not invalidate the value or authority of the books.

(2) But when we take the next point and examine the accusations of inaccuracy, we are surprised to find out how comparatively small they are, and, what is more to the purpose, how many of them are due, not to the sacred writers, but to our misapprehension of the scope and purpose of the writers. For instance, under the tyrannous yoke of the theory of verbal inspiration, so-called orthodox theologians were obliged to proclaim the literal accuracy of every word of the first chapter of Genesis. Their theory made them forget that they were Westerns reading an Oriental book; it made them painfully dull-witted, as all men enslaved by a literalist spirit must be; figure and fact were flung heedlessly together; the proverbial surgical operation would have been needful to get the understanding of a metaphor or poetical idea into their heads; days must be days, or at least equal lengthened periods. If we had

spoken to such people of an Essex lion,* they would never have been satisfied unless they had found his whelps in Epping Forest ; if we had told them that Glasgow magistrates had been fried by hundreds, they would have been anxious for the interference of the police. The idea of a popular (and because popular, poetical) account of the world's origin was far out of their sight. Yet it is surely one of the most patent facts that literal exactitude is in many cases more misleading than popular description. A certain poetry of form, which scientific minds dislike perhaps, is in hundreds of cases absolutely needful to popularise knowledge. "There are some things," writes the present Bishop of Carlisle, "which can only be described poetically, and the written accounts of which can only be recognised when their poetical character is recognised ; and I venture to think that any account of that which took place 'in the begin-

* Perhaps it is needful to explain that an Essex lion is a vulgarism for a calf, and that a Glasgow magistrate is, like a Norfolk capon, a red herring.

ning,' which involves the idea of 'creation' of which we have no experience, which refers to the relation between the unseen God and the visible creation, must in the nature of things belong to this class; if creation as the work of God be described at all, it must be poetically, figuratively, imaginatively, by reference to processes of which we have experience, and by means of pictures drawn therefrom." The truth, then, is, that more than half the difficulties, as more than half the controversies, of the world have been caused by prosaic-minded men, who turn poetry into prose; they are like the dog in the fable, who dropped the meat to grasp its shadow; for they lose not only the truth, but also the sweet symbol which was its constant witness.

If only, then, we can but allow a little naturalness in our method of reading the Bible, we shall avoid many troublesome rocks. Indeed, without going further into the question of the origin of the world, or the difficulties which are supposed to beset the book of Genesis, it is quite

in harmony with what we have said to find that the Mosaic account has been found to be not so wholly unscientific as has been imagined. Prof. Haeckel, for example, writes that the extraordinary success of the Mosaic history of creation "is explained not only by its close connection with Jewish and Christian doctrines, but also by the simple and natural chain of ideas which runs through it, and which contrasts favourably with the confused mythology of creation current among most of the other ancient nations." Nor is this all. The same writer recognises that the Mosaic account enshrines in its bosom "two great fundamental ideas, common also to the non-miraculous theory of development." These two ideas, which are accepted by Prof. Haeckel in this nineteenth century, are in the old unscientific Mosaic record. They meet us, he says, in this Mosaic hypothesis of creation with surprising clearness and simplicity—the idea of separation or differentiation, and the idea of progressive development or perfecting. "In his theory there lies hidden the ruling idea of

a progressive development and a differentiation of the originally simple matter." (Haeckel, vol. i., p. 38, quoted by Bishop of Carlisle: *vide supra.*)

When we call to mind the poetical form in which the Mosaic narrative is cast, and when we shake off the thraldom of literalism, we may see, from this single example, how very insignificant the much-talked-of inaccuracies become in the light of so much substantial truth.

(3) There remains another point which will best serve to make this clearer. We have seen that incidental errors are not of invalidating force; we have seen that mistakes and blunders are often the result of misapprehension and misinterpretation. It remains to ask, What is the purpose and drift of the sacred writers? It seems almost needless to ask this; but it is only by keeping this vigorously in view that we shall be able to see of what infinitesimal insignificance many of the controverted questions are. The books of the Bible are bound together for one common purpose: they are the records of the

moral and spiritual education of men and nations; they carry with them the story of the way in which God gradually revealed Himself, and sought to educate and develop the moral and spiritual character of His creatures. Over all the ages of men He is seen sitting as the refiner and purifier of silver, watching till His own features are reflected in the precious mass of human life.

Now to return for a moment to the Mosaic record of creation: it stands to reason that its purpose is to keep before the mind of the reader the divine origin of all things. The methods by which the universe assumed its present form are outside the intention of the writer; but he knows that a degraded idea of the world's origin brings about a degraded moral type of manhood; he would rescue the men for whom he wrote from abject superstition. The hugest monsters, the most appalling portents of nature, were from the hand of the Divine Creator, and were under His control. In learning to believe in the God of all, men would escape the slavery of the

childish fear which nature, naked and vast, might breed in their minds. He constructs his story to meet their case, and to save them from a dread, unworthy of their manhood and unworthy their origin as the children of God. Hence his narrative is not only, as it has been said, wholly free from mythological and superstitious taint, but it is instinct also with the only true and heart-elevating conception of God, a God who is greater than nature, who stands outside it, who is no helpless deity dragged at the wheels of his creation, but a God who made all things, and whose hand, as it had made, so also guides and orders all things. He is not, as many of the greatest gods of all the ancient nations have been described, a mere weather god. He is God, whose lightnings gave shine unto the world, whose voice is in the storm, whose paths are in the great waters, and yet who leads forth His people like sheep through this great and mysterious universe. Now, if we bear in mind the deification of nature which tinged all early creeds, we shall find in the Mosaic record the

antidote—God made great lights; this sun and moon and these stars, which men might be tempted to worship, are God's handiwork. Or, again, consider the tendency to worship animals, especially great monsters, which, either because of their size or mysterious habits, might be invested with supernatural power or sanctity, such as the crocodile worship in Egypt. What more fitting, then, than to write that all great monsters of land and sea, even the hugest and strongest, were still God's creation? In this light we see the marked significance and appropriateness of the words—"And God made great whales."

Our limits prohibit our going farther. The main thought is enough if we will but apply it, and remember that it is only by keeping in mind the purpose and intention of the writer that the relevance and fitness of his words will be made clear to us. Or, in other words, if we turn our thoughts to God, and remember Him as creator and preserver, as teacher and Saviour, we shall begin to see the traces of His guidance

and revelation in the progressive pages of the Bible. We shall be like those who, having climbed the mount of God, begin to see the true features of the landscape which puzzled us before. We shall not be afraid of science, for we shall know that all knowledge is of God. We shall not be much perplexed by what looks like scientific or historical mistakes in the Bible, for we shall know that its purpose is higher than these. The Bible, no less than the universe, is a painful and perplexing enigma without God; but in the Bible, as in the world, it is only in God's light that we shall see any light worthy of the name.

CHAPTER IV.

CONCERNING MORAL DIFFICULTIES.

THE misgiving which many people feel about the Bible is not due to one source only. The scientific difficulties, as they are called, do not impress the mind so deeply as many think ; for, though we may not be able to put it into words, we have a deep feeling that those matters have little to do with the real purpose of the Bible, which is a book full of life-teaching rather than of literary or scientific information. The difficulties which lie only in the intellectual atmosphere of the Bible are not by any means so formidable as those which affect moral questions.

If the Bible is in any sense a moral and spiritual guide, how is it that we find in it tales of wrong-doing, and examples of what looks very like immorality and cruelty sanctioned in its pages? At the root of these difficulties lie our very wrong thoughts of what the Bible is.

It is just here that many good and excellent people have occasioned difficulties which might have been avoided had piety always been allied with good sense. In their zeal, however, to maintain the dignity and authority of the Bible, they introduced methods of unreal interpretation. It was not enough for them to watch the great tide of moral education flowing on from period to period in the Bible story. They thought that every wave, and even every recoiling wave, was as full of inspired progress as the set of the tide. They would have it, not merely that God was teaching men from age to age to live purer and better lives, but that the morality of the early ages, and often even of individual characters in those ages, left nothing to be desired. In their reverence for all they read, they began to be afraid even of blaming the blameworthy. All this, though the outcome of a motive which was good in its way, led to most disastrous results, for the very educational purpose of the Bible was lost sight of. Here as well as elsewhere we must keep in

mind the law of growth: the moral character of men ought to be improving from age to age; the perfection of one generation ought not to be the standard of the next; for each should move on after some higher ideal. This is just the law of growth working in the world. It is precisely the same principle which we adopt in the study of the intellectual growth of people and nations. Many a schoolboy now knows more than the great thinkers of the past. The laws of gravity and of the movement of the planets are quite familiar to us, but they were far beyond the reach of the knowledge of Plato or Aristotle. In the same way, there are things which are obvious to our moral sense which were by no means clear to the moral sense of Solomon or Jacob. The laws of morality have not changed any more than have the laws of gravity or motion; but we must ever distinguish between the unchangeable laws of God and the progressiveness of human knowledge, between eternal principles and man's education in the knowledge of those principles.

In the Bible, then, we are reading the story of an education. In part we are watching the training of a nation—Israel; and all through we are seeing examples of the way God tries to lead men into the consciousness of higher laws and better modes of life. But we are not watching growth like the growth of a tree: it is rather growth as that of a child, where there is not simply a physical advance, but a deepening moral experience arising from a constant conflict going on with the lower and baser impulses of nature, and from the difficulty of bringing instincts, energies, and affections into harmony of action. The tide is coming in, but the waves seem sometimes to rush back into the deep ocean again, and to lose the vantage ground which they had apparently gained.

It stands to reason that such a progress must be slow, and that it is on the whole better that it should be slow, since rapid advance would be more superficial than real; and if, then, necessarily slow, it follows that

all the evil cannot be got rid of at once, but that, step by step, one after another, the evil habits should be conquered. They must not be assailed all at once: some must be tolerated till the race or people is ripe for the next advance.

An illustration may make this clearer.

Suppose a teacher who is brought in to educate and superintend a number of children, whose training has been sadly neglected. Such a teacher may be either fussily anxious or calmly judicious. The fussily anxious will be pained and shocked at the many bad habits of her pupils: she will make a dead set at all their faults and all their foibles; new-broom like, she will endeavour to sweep everything clean, and, being ambitious of immediate improvement, she will dash her broom at every cobweb and investigate every dust-hole. Every one knows that new brooms are highly to be esteemed for their zeal's sake, but in nine cases out of ten they are also to be blamed for their stupidity's sake. Their eagerness defeats its own end

The man who, introduced into a new sphere, commences it by a policy of censure, and an irritating incessancy of new plans and novel rules, has a splendid chance of failure before him. The wiser method is the method of patience. The teacher who is anxious for reputation or credit begins by dashing wildly at everything which sins against his ideal of what school should be; the teacher who has the good and the ultimate education of the pupil at heart is content to move slowly, and to build up, step by step, the changes and improvements which he wishes to see. Such a teacher is wisely tolerant of much which he secretly disapproves; he knows that not the spotlessness of external conformity with a series of martinet rules is to be desired, but a spirit which is being educated to the love of better things because they are better. Every one can understand the superiority of the wise reformer who is content to move slowly, and never loses faith in the ultimate progress of the race, though its advance is only won by almost imperceptible

stages, and the mad, frantic revolutionary, who would rather run the risk of killing than wait patiently for the cure.

But it will be said, "We can quite understand that the education must be progressive, and that the morality of one age must not be set up as the standard of the next; but what we are puzzled at is that God is said to do or to suggest some of the things which seem immoral in themselves. That men should do them and be gradually taught better is perfectly intelligible; but that the very God, who is educating them, should inspire or sanction them, is what most troubles us."

This difficulty springs out of the mixture of good and evil, which is the condition of moral growths. Every one must have noticed how often actions are done in the world which look half like the inspiration of the highest self-sacrifice and half the impulse of mere barbarism. We condemn the violence, for example, but we commend the generosity and heroism of the deed. Many examples occur to our mind.

Contemplated from one side, the leap of Curtius is a homage to ignorance and superstition; but from another side, it is an act of chivalrous devotion. We can applaud the spirit of such deeds: their brilliant disinterestedness makes us pardon their folly.

It is the same with some Bible incidents. Take, for example, the sacrifice of Isaac. The man must have a heart chilled by criticism who does not feel that there is a grandeur in the spirit of the Patriarch when he shows himself willing to surrender what is dearest to him. In his life, he had found God to be all in all to him; in his dangers and vicissitudes, God had been near to him. Struggle and privation had waited on his earlier years, but prosperity had become his, and his house was enriched by the soft, sweet music of child-laughter. Was it a poor or ignoble impulse which urged him to offer his best-beloved to the God who had never failed him? Call it superstition; call it a dark and revolting thought: it is so in our enlightened eyes. But can we not trace in the

readiness or even yearning to yield up the sweetest and brightest thing in his life the very same spirit which, in a more enlightened age, counted not its life dear unto itself? Is it not the deep and pathetic expression of the same love which, under brighter circumstances, went and sold all that it had to become a disciple in the life of true sacrifice? Devotion, love, high self-surrender are in the act, though the method of expressing it is dark and tinged with ignorance of God's character.

But how can God be in any act, or how can He sanction or approve any act, which has fellowship with so dark a thought? God is the author of the best and truest impulses of our nature. His divine spirit breathes the energies of all loftiness, all nobleness, all lovingness into human life; from Him springs the impulse and instinct that life should be devotion and sacrifice. The root motive which was good in Abraham's act was in this sense of God. Does God approve? He approves the spirit which can face the bitterest sacrifice

out of a sense of duty, even though the sense of duty be a mistaken and a degraded one. But God is educating Abraham. The story does not end with the impulse in Abraham's mind; it ends with bringing Abraham into a fuller and truer conception of the God whom he worshipped. Gently and firmly, with the fullest approval of the intention and motive of the sacrifice, the sacrifice itself is refused. The patriarch is shown that such sacrifices are not to be; that, though devotion and love and unselfish service are dear and acceptable to God, He takes no delight in the ruthless or superstitious rending of the sweet ties of life. Abraham can return home with the atmosphere of his religious life cleared. If he, in a moment of dark and mistaken theological feeling, grudged himself the natural joys of love and home life, now he may go back happy; the cloudy thoughts of God are gone. God rejoices in the gladness of His inheritance, and delights in the felicity of His chosen.

It is necessary, then, not merely to read the

Bible stories as simple tales, but to read them as records of the way in which the impulses and instincts of men were guided, chastened, and elevated. Before we condemn, we must ask what we know of the characters and needs of the men and women whose lives we have been reading, and what bearing the incident or story has upon the education of these people. It is here, as we have seen before, impossible to deal fairly by the Bible without remembering the law of growth. In that law, the platform of each stage must be made good before any advance is made to a higher; and the apparent toleration of evil, and even its apparent sanction, are only the expression of the unripeness of mankind for that mode of life from which such evil would be expelled. It is, to use the Bible expression, because of the hardness of men's hearts. Nor need we wonder. If man's history be the story of his emergence from a low animalism, can we wonder—who have been made familiar with the millenniums demanded by science for a small physical change—that the moral education of

men towards a high type of life and hope should require some thousands of years? Read aright, these Bible stories are full of hope; they indicate progress, clear and distinct, though necessarily slow; they reveal the guiding hand of a God who is patient and longsuffering, not extreme to mark what is amiss, but earnest and persevering in seeking to raise what is low, and to kindle from age to age the flame of holy desire for all that is noble and true and good.

CHAPTER V.

THE BIBLE A LIBRARY.

THERE seems to be need to ask the question, "What is the Bible?" There is, perhaps, also equal need to ascertain "what it is *not*." Misconceptions are easily formed, but not so easily got rid of, and error, as Edmund Burke said, has a perennial source. Now, one of the safest methods of getting rid of misconceptions is to begin, as we say, at the beginning, and lay aside for the moment all that we know upon a subject, or all that we think that we know.

Acting in this way, let us open our Bibles. The Bible begins with Genesis and ends with Revelation—*i.e.*, between the covers of the Bible are contained a number of different books, which range over an immense field of history, and which belong to very different times. In fact, what we perceive is that the Bible is rather a collection of sacred literature than a single

book. Some people may not quite like this description; but on reflection it will be felt that it is not a description which need produce any alarm. All that is meant is that the volume we call the Bible contains a collection of books which were produced at different periods, and written for different people, and with varying purposes. In using this language, too, we are hardly doing more than reverting to an old method of describing the Bible when it was called the Divine Library; and one of our best and most reverent students of the Bible has said, after enumerating the various names by which the Bible was known: "Of all, perhaps, the *Library*, the term which seems to have been irrevocably lost, is the most expressive, and includes the idea of 'the Book' and 'the Books' with the most felicitous simplicity." (Prof. Westcott.)

But whether we like the phrase or not, we have to deal with what is true, and we shall do best for ourselves and for the Bible also by rigorously endeavouring to take up just what is

true about it and no more. The Bible, then, is a collection of books, and the literature which is found in them stretches over a period of at least twelve hundred years, and probably much more. Let us endeavour to realise what this means. The literature of England, from Chaucer to Tennyson and Browning, ranges over five or six hundred years; the literature of the Bible, from Moses to St. John, embraces the same period twice told. All this means history. No sensible man would dream of undertaking the study of English writers without reference to the history of the English people. The obscure pages begin to live in the light of contemporary events; the dark phrase is illumined with meaning; behind the subtle portraiture of the poet's hand stands some living man. Not only so; the pages of the writers reflect the growth of the nation; the history and the literature move side by side; as in the twin glasses of the stereoscope, the picture gains in life-likeness when seen through both.

It is perfectly true that the materials in our

hands are smaller in the case of the Bible; but this only serves to make our work simpler; it does not alter the principles of intelligent study. Where the Psalms, for example, can be illustrated from the history of Israel or the life of the poet, the narrative and the hymn are alike the gainers in clearness and interest. But it is not a question of mere vividness gained: it is a question also of truth; for in some cases the reference to the history makes all the difference between a true and a false interpretation of a passage. It is, therefore, of the highest moment to remember that the books of the Bible are allied with history.

And what does history in this connection mean? Every year we are beginning to learn more clearly the law of the world's growth, and the dependence of one age upon another. Formerly we were content with viewing the world and the nations of the world as in practical isolation from each other and the universe. Now the conception of interdependence and what is called solidarity is being more clearly appre-

hended. No age, no country, no creed can say to another, "I have no need of thee." In the eye of the thoughtful, it is true of epochs, races, and modes of thought, that the most feeble are necessary. The most meagre historical period has contributed its share to the growing life of human kind. If it has afforded nothing else, it has been at least a platform on which the succeeding age has been able to plant a firm foot, and to advance to something higher and better. The apostolic thought is becoming better understood. Men of all ages and all climates are of one blood, and in no age did God "leave Himself" wholly "without witness." The ages may have changed, but the unchanging purpose runs like a silver thread throughout them; the plant of human life has passed through its varying phases of rudimentary and then more fully-developed life and form: first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear, growing up slowly, silently, we know not how, to perfect beauty and use. The more this is realised, the more clearly are hints and indica-

tions of a superintending purpose visible in the world's story to those who have eyes to see.

And if we can but shake off our preconceptions, we shall see the same law of growth witnessed, too, in the Bible, and in it we shall see that parallel to the witness of God's purpose in the world's development is the witness of God's advancing education of mankind in the pages of the Bible. For the moment we remember the word history, and recall as a consequence the story of the growing civilisation and knowledge among men, we feel that we must be prepared to find in the Bible, if it is in any sense a light of men, an adaptation of moral and spiritual teaching to the slow-moving growth of the heart, mind, and conscience of humanity. What are simple and needful religious conceptions to our minds, would have been difficult, if not unintelligible, to Abraham and Moses, to Elijah and Hezekiah. The principles of religious life never change, any more than the axioms and elementary principles of pure mathematics; but the power of grasping the more perfect

results grow from age to age. This is what criticism and research have combined to show us. Only one obstacle hinders our gaining the advantages which spring from this fresh knowledge. The obstacle lies in our fondness for our own notions: we bow down with such idolatrous homage to the systems of our own thoughts that we call the overthrow of these the fall of God's kingdom. Yet we are people who have been taught to believe that the idols God will utterly abolish. If we are honest, we shall wish to know the truth; if we are humble, we shall be ready to learn it; if we are devout, we shall know that no change in our notions can make God untrue; if we are intelligent, we shall easily discriminate between the discovery of our own mistakes and the failure of God's wisdom.

But we need not be afraid of the effect of real knowledge. All that we have been taught amounts to this—that that which grows is better than that which is ready-made; we have been shown the need of perspective in our pictures.

The Bible was read by many as though the events of the ages of Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jeremiah, and St. Paul stood upon the same horizon; we flattened our view by this means, and reduced a beautiful landscape to the level of a Chinese picture, destitute of light, shade, distance, and foreground. The effect of this practically was to transform the Bible from a splendid witness of God's superintendence over all ages and forms of human life into a great repertory of oracular utterances, which often confounded history and sinned against facts. To escape from the tyrannous blundering of such methods, it was necessary to begin again; to shake ourselves loose from our mistakes, and to ask, not what we thought, but what the Bible taught, and for this purpose we had to ask what the Bible really was.

And we discover that the Bible is not like a coin, stamped with all its lines and features in a moment; but it is a thing which has developed: it is not like a dead piece of money; it is like a living tree, proving its life by its growth: it is

not like a row of houses run up hastily by a speculative and unoriginal-minded builder, in which every house is the counterpart of the other, and every room reproducing the same monotonous features; it is rather like a vast cathedral, whose building has been the growth of centuries, and whose grand harmony of effect is heightened by variety of its details and the historical characteristics of its architecture. If we wish to be sure of this in the Bible's own showing, let us remember what the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews said of the divers portions and divers manners of God's speech to the fathers by the prophets (Heb. i. 1). If we wish to see the fitness of this method, and its immeasurable superiority over other methods, let us remember that had a revelation been made, and handed down ready-made to earth, it would have suited a stationary world, and not a progressive one; whereas, a revelation slowly unfolding itself along the way of life as men were able to bear it, is just what a world of progress demands. In this way the Bible becomes

a book of life and a book for life; it is a revelation which has kept pace with the growing needs and intelligence of men; it is the Word which has been a lamp to their advancing footsteps, and a light on the various ways of man's moving history.

The practical duty which results from this is not far to seek. We must treat the Bible as a book with a history; we must read it, not in desultory fashion, or interpret it according to our own arbitrary judgments, or even appropriate its consolations to suit our indolent appetite for spiritual comfort; we must adopt a more scientific treatment; we must gather up the principles which underlie its teachings by ascertaining what its words did mean to those who first heard them; we must rigorously reject all comfortable anachronisms; we must resolutely sacrifice all pet passages, in whose misinterpretation we have been wont to bolster up our slothful faith. If we do this in all honesty, we shall win the reward; the good things which we seem to lose we shall win again in better and

healthier fashion. For in Bible interpretation, as elsewhere, the principle is true: "He that saveth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life shall save it." An untrue application of a text becomes a source of weakness, however happy we may have been in the comfortable misinterpretation of it. On the other hand, if we will but frankly recognise the fact that the Bible is a growth, and that its words and teachings had a primary application for a people who were not ourselves, we shall put ourselves in the way of reaching the truth, which, given to them, has its counterpart for us and for all. We lose, but we gain. We lose the superficial advantages; we gain the hidden treasure. We break up the surface of the soil, and in doing so many a little flower and eye-refreshing grass is uprooted; but we get beneath the surface the rich and varied ore, which centuries of change and season have buried there.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BIBLE A GROWTH.

SOME people are a little afraid when they are told that criticism has revealed that there are books in the Bible which are compilations. They have been so accustomed to regard these from a very modern point of view, that they are distressed when they are asked to use a little historical instinct. They have thought that the books of the Bible are like modern books—planned, commenced, and completed by one writer, and at one period. When they are told that some of the books grew up to their present form, and betray the touch of more than one writer, they are troubled, for it seems to them that the whole inspired strength of the book is destroyed by such a supposition.

Now, it is not my purpose or duty to enter into the results of historical criticism. or even to

pronounce an opinion upon any of the interesting questions, such as the dates of different parts of the Bible, or the authorship of portions of Isaiah and Daniel. It is enough for us to know that in the judgment of some the sixty-six chapters of Isaiah did not proceed from the same hand, and that there are critics who are persuaded that more than one writer shared in the composition of Daniel. In saying this, we are only calling to mind what is perfectly well known, not only to students, but even to all ordinarily thoughtful readers. But what I am most anxious to show is that there is not the slightest need for alarm or distrust in the matter, and that, even if it should be the case that a great many more hands took part in the building up of our present Bible, we are not in the least degree the losers. No change in the date of one portion of the books or another can disturb the great coherence and harmony of the whole, as a little reflection will show.

The present Bible is a growth. The books, even on the most old-fashioned supposition,

were written at different times by different people, and under very different circumstances; yet, wonderful to relate, no Bible student can fail to see that there is a marvellous unity of thought pervading all. With all the variety of light and shade, of poetry and history, of prophecy and didactic writing, a great and unchanging purpose runs through the Bible. It is, to use the language of Prof. Westcott, "a book *manifold* by the variety of times and circumstances in which its several parts had their rise, *one* by the inspiring presence of the same spiritual life." Now, it must be quite clear that the greater the variety of sources and circumstances from which the Bible sprung, the more wonderful is the unity of spirit and result which is maintained. To use again a former illustration, the Bible may be compared to a cathedral whose parts have been built at different successive ages; the traces of these ages are easily seen in the architectural style, but all are knit together in one holy temple of God. Closer investigation of this cathedral

shows that the historical range of its growth is greater and wider than was at first supposed. The stones which have been built in, it seems, were drawn from widely-scattered quarries; here are marbles which must have been imported from distant lands; here are great blocks of stone which must have been conveyed from unthought-of hills; here are richly-carved capitals which show some foreign skill; but all these have found their fitting place. Each stone, each ornament, drops into the spot prepared for it; arch, pillar, buttress, mullion, and pinnacle, whatever their greater or their lesser antiquity, are lending support or beauty, and fulfilling their functions as parts of one vast sanctuary, whose purpose is not lost or altered because antiquarians have made its stories doubly interesting and doubly dear by enlarging the bounds of its history and adding new elements to the story of its growth.

There is another fact which must not be overlooked. Variety of age and variety of authorship carries with it often variety of in-

tellectual type. Men may believe the same truths, but as long as minds differ they will clothe their utterance in language which corresponds with their mental characteristics. The Bible is not merely a growth and aggregation of books: it is a great treasury of the varying moods of life; the voices which ring out from its pages are many, as the voices of human fear and love, and hope and joy; and yet they are animated by one key-note which is divine.

It is as though we went into a great hall, where the various wind and stringed instruments were being made ready for the concert. We listen, and hear the deep tones of the bass-viol, the loud and, perhaps because sounding solitary, discordant bray of the trumpet, the shrill note of some lively pipe, the wailing cry, as of a soul in pain, which breaks from the violin. These sound as the anguished and divergent voices of the world.

> "O earth, so full of weary noises;
> O men, with sorrow in your voices."

But we listen once more. The voices of these

instruments are still heard, but a sweet government has been introduced. Now their notes, clear and deep, pathetic or triumphant, lend themselves to the progress of one great melody. They do not grate upon us now; they are welcome; they carry our spirits with them; the drama of music is being unfolded to us; we drink in solo and chorus with an unfailing joy, even when we are moved to tears; we are touched and transported; we experience a sweet content and a deep assurance that all these changing tones will blend at last in some great hallelujah chorus.

So is it with the Bible. It has its various tones. We can trace the differing types of thought; we can hear the ever-changing cry of the human spirit as it passes through the hours of its agony, its doubt, its despair, its joy, and its confidence; but we listen again, when we have recognised the one-pervading and educating spirit of God which runs through all, and then we find into what deep harmony all these varying voices and tones of mind have

been drawn, and what a rich ministry of strength and comfort lurks in them for the spirits of men. The power of the Bible, we find, lies in a sweet appropriateness to the differing moods of life, joined to a great guiding spirit which carries its music onward to the anthem of redemption: "Thou hast loved, Thou hast washed us in Thine own blood, and made us kings and priests to God."

If, then, we find in the Bible that the books which we thought to be single compositions are rather compilations which have slowly taken their present form; if we should find, moreover, that the writers frequently represent special types of human thought, we need not fear: the divine integrity of the book becomes the more remarkable, the greater and the wider is the human variety. The more completely the forms of intellectual life are represented, the more striking does the single dominant divine thought become; the greater the length of time through which the evolution has taken place, the more marked is its result.

It remains, then, but to remind ourselves that such a thread of unity does run through the Bible. In fact, if we are to understand nature by the law of growth, we must understand the Bible also by the same law—growth, *i.e.*, the slow unfolding of the end or purpose which is aimed at. Such is distinctly traceable in the Bible, and, being traced, becomes a key to its true interpretation, and a help, therefore, in our method of reading. For instance, the reader of the Old Testament must have noticed that in its progress it suggests to us successively the thought of the ideal family, the ideal nation, the ideal king. Time and space will not allow of our doing more than hinting at these ideals. But it is sufficiently evident that the earlier portions of the Old Testament are occupied with the history of the family. We see the constant striving after the ideal family; we are learning what the family should be, and how the family is under God's care, and is designed to be a nucleus of influence through which God is to be known. The words spoken of Abraham

are as a key-note of this thought: "I have known him that he might command his children and his household after him, and that they might keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment."

The thought of the ideal nation succeeds that of the family. Not families only, but nations, have their part to play in the writer's story, and are responsible for their good and evil influence. These influences are, in Bible language, their angels. An ideal nation, then, becomes the topic of the next portion of the Bible. The nation is prepared; vicissitude and suffering discipline its early years; in constant trial and affliction it is taught to trust God and to preserve its own unity. The ideal is never realised, but it is suggested so strongly that the name Israel becomes the natural one for us to use of any people or Church contemplated from its ideal side.

To the thought of the ideal nation, and in part rising out of it, is added that of the ideal king. If Israel is a representative idea through

which the world is to be taught, the King of Israel, in whose hands the true and unwavering sceptre of righteousness is placed, is a naturally corresponding one. The people need their sovereign ; their dream is of one who will fulfil all their expectations, and in whose leadership all their best and noblest aspirations may find expression. The conception of what this ideal king must be grows from age to age. As thought climbs upward along the pathway of successive generations, the idea becomes more clearly defined. This is the external account of the matter, which the very faintest and most superficial study of the Old Testament discloses. It is the growth, we may say, of the Messianic idea in Israel. But it is precisely this growth which indicates the presiding guidance of God ; for the idea, as it grows, runs before the development or average level of the nation's thought. It is a thought which shapes itself outside the grossness of the popular life, and, if we may say so, which grows more spiritual as they become more carnal. But

yet it is never divorced from the pious and unselfish, or more spiritual among the people. Some there are who, yielding themselves to the teaching and guidance of the growing light, have formed, under those influences, truer and higher expectations, and are ready to recognise the features of that Messiah, though His advent should not be heralded by outward pomp. We catch the utterance of their satisfied hopes: "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and the Prophets did write." It breaks out into the song, which is the attestation of the best Messianic hopes: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel."

In following this Messianic line of thought, which broadens like the light of the sunrise along the pages of the prophets and teachers of Israel, we may perceive the great unity of spirit and hope which pervades the Old Testament. God

left not Himself without witness. He spake in time past to the fathers by the prophets. We have thus, in one hand, the thread which guides us safely through the labyrinth of interpretation, This is that hope of Christ which has led to contempt and to bonds, but which yet is an answer to heart questions and world problems.

There is a double thread, it must be remembered, in this line. On the human side, man is working out the problem; he questions his heart; he sifts and probes; he utters his thoughts; from age to age the utterance becomes clearer; the hopes of the race begin to centre, not in a *regime*, nor in a philosophy, nor in a dynasty, nor in a dogma, but in a Person. Into this line there is the heavenly thread; these agonising wrestlers and anxious questioners were not left alone; the breath of the Almighty gave them wisdom; what they wrought out in suffering became, when uttered, the everlasting song of sacred prophecy: holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

The law of growth in spiritual thought is thus unfolded in the Old Testament. It is the same in the New Testament. The perceptions of the disciples of our Lord were not at first so clear as they became afterwards. Even in their expressions of unwavering trust in their Master, we can see that they did not clearly see at once all that He was. Their notions were not wholly emancipated from the prejudices or preconceptions of their age. But as the light grew, and their eyes grew more and more accustomed to its shining, their thoughts and convictions became clearer.

Keeping in mind this principle of growth in the education of the disciples, we get again a key to the study of the books of the New Testament; and as we watch the light pouring in broadening and brighter flood upon the minds of the disciples, we find that we, too, gain more perfect knowledge of that light which shines more and more to the perfect day. The study of the New Testament, so conducted, carries the conviction of its trust-

worthiness more completely to our minds. We see not a ready-made story, repeated with the glibness of primed witnesses; but we see the truth growing (as it were) in the minds of the Apostles themselves.

"No exercise," writes Prof. Westcott, "can give a more vivid impression of the historical truth and unity of the writings of the New Testament, than an investigation of the gradual unfolding of the teaching on the Person of Christ which they contain, in connection with the circumstances under which the several statements are given. In the early chapters of the Acts, for example, it is possible to see how the Apostles were enabled, step by step, under the guidance of the Spirit, to apprehend naturally (so to speak) the divine character of Him with whom they had 'companied' as men with Man. On the other hand, it is impossible to understand how any one writing first, when the belief of the Church was already shaped, could have traced the successive phases through which it passed in the first days. The record is evidently a direct transcript from life."

The conclusion, then, is obvious. Let none of us be afraid to recognise in all parts of the Bible, whether in the formation of its books or in the development of its truths, the law of growth. The best things grow: our best thoughts, our best habits, our best affections, are those which have not leaped into being, but which have grown upon us. Their very growth makes them dearer to us, for growth is a sign of life. Dead things are made; living things must grow. In finding, then, this law of growth, we find the evidence of the life of the Bible. We find also the witness of the tenderness of God's providence, which slowly unfolded to men the revelation of Himself and His love as they were able to bear it.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GROWTH OF THE BIBLE.

THERE is one question which often troubles Bible readers. They ask themselves, "How can I be sure that what I am reading are the true words of the writers? If I have a letter from a friend, I have the words in his own handwriting, and I am sure that the words I read are just the words he wrote. But the Gospels and Epistles I read out of a printed book; how can I be sure that I am reading really what St. Mark and St. John and St. Paul wrote?" The answer to this question is found in a little bit of history. To go fully into it would require more space than we can spare. But there are plenty of books in which such a question is fully answered. For our purpose it will be enough to give a sketch of the kind of answer which the question needs.

What we really want to find out is, how far

back can we trace these books. Of course, we know very well that we can show that these books existed substantially, as we now have them, five or six hundred years ago. We might take, for example, an English Hexapla (such as that published by the S.P.C.K.), and there we should read, printed in parallel columns the translations of the Bible made by Wycliffe, Tyndale, and Coverdale. This would satisfy us that these books were in existence then. But we can go much farther back. There are three MSS. of great antiquity; and we should find that these were copies of the Bible, and substantially the same as the Bible we read. These MSS. are fourteen or fifteen hundred years old, and it would be very surprising to find them undamaged; but though some portions have evidently been lost, there remains quite enough to show that the books we value most were read in the Church of God, to all intents and purposes, as we read them now. These three MSS. are full of interest.

One of them is called the Alexandrine MS.,

and is in the British Museum. It is as old as the early part of the fifth century. It contains the Old Testament nearly complete, and all the New Testament, with the exception of a great part of St. Matthew, two chapters of St. John; and of the Epistles as many as eight chapters of 2 Corinthians are missing.

The second MS. is called the Vatican MS. This is thought to be still older, and to have been written in the fourth century. Some of Genesis is wanting; and in the New Testament the pastoral Epistles of St. Paul, the latter part of the Epistle to the Hebrews are missing, and the Book of Revelation.

The third MS. is called the Sinaitic. Its interest lies in the fact that it was discovered in our own age, and rescued from the fate of being burned. Its probable date is believed to be about the fourth century. The Old Testament is by no means complete; but the whole of the New Testament is there.

The three great MSS. remain as monuments of the care and reverence for the Bible in the

fourth and fifth centuries. But this is not all. These MSS. are but copies of the sacred books of the Old and New Testament, which were accepted and studied, reverenced and commented on, by the great teachers of that age. We find that the Fathers of the Church, as they are called, had before them the same Bible. Jerome (A.D. 329—420), for example, whose life extended from the early part of the fourth century to the beginning of the fifth, devoted himself to the study of the Bible. He translated the Old Testament from the original Hebrew into Latin; he revised also an earlier Latin version of the New Testament, and this laid the foundation of what was commonly called the Vulgate. Here, again, we meet in the pages of Jerome the evidence that the Bible which the Churches of the fourth and fifth centuries read is substantially the same as our own Bible. The same fact would appear in the writings of Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354—430).

If we go to the East, we shall find evidence that there, too, the Bible, substantially the same

as our own, was recognised, known, and so widely circulated as to be within the reach of all who were earnest enough to make the effort to obtain copies. Thus, for example, Chrysostom (A.D. 347—407), who burned with zeal to make the Bible known, reproached his hearers for their apathy. "As many of the poorer classes are constantly making this excuse (*i.e.*, that manuscripts were so expensive) that they have no Bibles, I would like to ask them, can poverty, however great it may be, hinder a man when he does not possess a complete set of the tools required for his trade? What then? Is it not singular that in this case he never thinks of laying the blame on his poverty, but does his best that it may not hinder him; while, on the other hand, in a case where he is to be so great a gainer, he complains of his poverty."

The Bible which is spoken of is the Bible which contains the fourteen Epistles of St. Paul, the four Gospels, the Acts, and three of the Catholic Epistles—*i.e.*, James, 1 Peter, and 1 John.

We may trace back farther. We can go to the beginning of the third century. We find Tertullian (A.D. 190—220), whose life extended from the latter half of the second century into the early half of the third century, speaking of the sacred writings of the Church of his day as well known and recognised. His language shows that the same books which form the strength of our Bible were then treasured and appealed to.

"We lay it down as our first position, that the Evangelical Testament has Apostles for its authors, to whom was assigned by the Lord Himself this office of publishing the Gospel. . . . Of the Apostles, therefore, John and Matthew first instil faith into us; while of Apostolic men, Luke and Mark renew it afterwards." And again: "Let us see what milk the Corinthians drank from Paul; to what rule the Galatians were recalled by his reproofs; what is read by the Philippians, the Thessalonians, and the Ephesians; what is the testimony of the Romans, who are nearest to us, to whom Peter and Paul left the Gospel, and that sealed

by their own blood." (Adv. Marcion, iv. c. 2 and 5.)

Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 195), who flourished about the same time, quotes fully and copiously from the Bible, as the following calculation will show :—"I find that of the eighty-nine chapters comprised in the four Gospels, there are quotations from all except fourteen. Every chapter but two of St. Matthew is quoted; every chapter but five of St. Mark; every chapter but three of St. Luke; and all but four of St. John. His quotations from the Gospels alone number four hundred."—("Genuineness and Authenticity of the Gospels," by Rev. R. I. Crosthwaite.)

The books of the Old Testament in the same way were recognised. Melito was Bishop of Sardis in the latter part of the second century (A.D. 172); his life was partially contemporary with those of Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria.

"Onesimus, a Christian of Asia Minor, had frequently expressed a desire 'to learn the exact truth with regard to the Old Books, how many

they were in number, and their order.' Melito, Bishop of Sardis—'who directed the whole conduct of his life in the Holy Spirit'—after 'a visit to the East, and even to the very spot where [all which we believe] was proclaimed and done, in which he obtained exact knowledge of the Books of the Old Covenant,' sent a list of them to his friend. 'The names of them are,' he says, 'five books of Moses—*Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Numbers*, *Leviticus*, *Deuteronomy*; *Jesus*, the son of Naue; *Judges*, *Ruth*; four *Books of Kings*, two of *Chronicles*, a book of the *Psalms* of David, the *Proverbs* of Solomon, which is also called *Wisdom*, *Ecclesiastes*, the *Song of Songs*, *Job*; the Books of the Prophets *Isaiah*, *Jeremiah*, the *Twelve* in a single book; *Daniel*, *Ezekiel*, *Esdras* (*Ezra*).'" (Prof. Westcott.)

Let us seek further. We can touch an earlier generation still, and question it. Irenæus is a well-known name. He was a disciple of Polycarp, and subsequently became Bishop of Lyons. He was born in 120 A.D.; he was between thirty and forty when his teacher, Polycarp,

was put to death, and his life was prolonged till the opening of the third century. From him we gather evidence of the existence of what we may still call the Bible of his day. "Nothing," says Prof. Westcott, "can be clearer than his assertion of the equal dignity of the Old and New Testaments, of the permanent spiritual value of every part of them, of their supreme power as the rule of truth." ("Bible in the Church," p. 122.) He gives an account of the origin of the Gospels, dwelling with fondness for mystical meaning upon the fact that they were four in number. He quotes the Acts, twelve epistles of St. Paul, the Apocalypse, 1 John, and 1 Peter.

There is another interesting piece of evidence belonging to this period. It is drawn from the MS. which is known as the Muratorian fragment, as it was published last century by Muratori. The fragment is generally believed to belong to the latter half of the second century; the writer claims to have been a contemporary of Pius, Bishop of Rome. The interest

of the fragment lies mainly in the account which may be gathered from it of the sacred Scriptures. The Gospels of Mark, Luke, and John, the Acts of the Apostles, thirteen epistles of St. Paul, the Apocalypse of St. John, are referred to. The writer speaks of the fact that as St. John addressed seven epistles to the seven churches of Asia, so St. Paul also wrote to seven separate churches. This MS. is, as we have said, a fragment, and there seems reason to believe that in its complete and original form other books of the Bible were also spoken of.

To this we may add, before closing this chapter, one thing more. Tatian the Syrian compiled a book, entitled the "Diatesseron, or Fourfold Gospel;" its date was about 170 or 180. It seems now to be "definitely ascertained [said Prof. Sanday at the Church Congress] that the Diatesseron did consist of our four canonical Gospels." The drift of this conclusion is, not merely that the four Gospels were in existence at that date, but that "the line of demarcation

which separated the canonical from other Gospels was already drawn." (See pp. 91, 92 of Official Report of Church Congress at Reading, 1883.)

On the whole, then, so far as we have gone, we have seen that, taking up the history of the Scriptures at different epochs, we can trace the existence of what is substantially our New Testament as far back as the middle of the second century, where we find it not merely as a vague and nebulous Gospel, but in distinct and clear form. It must, moreover, be remembered that in tracing it back thus far, we come within reach of those who had spoken with the disciples and pupils of the Apostles themselves.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GROWTH OF THE BIBLE (*continued*).

We can rest assured, then, that the New Testament substantially as we now have it existed and was recognised, commented on and appealed to, as authoritative in the latter half of the second century. Can we go back any farther? Fortunately the stream of witnesses does not run dry. We have writers whose lives and testimony can reach even earlier times. In dealing with these, the simplest way will be to let them come before us in succession. Our space will only permit of the very briefest summary of their evidence.

1. There is Justin Martyr (A.D. 140—150). He is one of those whose story is well known. Archbishop Trench's poem has made it familiar to us once more. We know how his unsatisfied spirit wandered from philosophy to philosophy, till he met with an aged man by the sea-shore, who

told him of a rest which went down to the depths of human nature, and which Christian teachers were proclaiming to mankind. We know the result: the conversion of Justin, his labours afterwards, and his martyrdom at Rome about 150 A.D. "Justin's writings, or at least some of them, remain: we can hear him arguing with Trypho, the Jew; we can listen to his defence of Christianity. It is quite true that we do not now meet with quotations in the same way that we did in the writings of later Christian teachers. Justin's line of argument did not depend upon the quotation of an assemblage of texts. But we can gather from his writings the substance of the Gospel story. It would be possible to re-write from Justin's works a considerable part of the records of Christ's life, as given by the first three Evangelists. By putting together various passages from these, we can collect almost all the details of the history of the birth and infancy of our Lord, of the mission of John, of the Baptism, of the Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension, which are given in the Synoptic

Gospels." (Prof. Westcott.) So far we may see that the general outline of Gospel history was as complete in Justin's days as it is in our own. But this is not all. Justin was evidently acquainted with written Gospels; for he speaks of "memoirs" written by the Apostles: "The Apostles in the memoirs made by them which are called Gospels," &c. These memoirs of the Apostles, he tells, were read in the Christian Church, as were the writings of the Prophets. In speaking more particularly, he alludes to facts related in these memoirs which are identical with those which we read in our Gospels.

2. There is Papias (A.D. 130). He was Bishop of Hierapolis, in Phrygia; he was a friend of Polycarp, who was, as we know, a pupil of St. John. The life of Papias touches the early part of the second century. From him we gather that written Gospels existed in his time. "Matthew compiled," he says, "the oracles in Hebrew." He mentions also the way in which the Gospel of St. Mark came to be written. "This also the elder (John) used to say: Mark,

having become St. Peter's interpreter, wrote accurately all that he (Peter) mentioned, though he did not (record) in order that which was either said or done by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed Him; but he subsequently, as I said (attached himself to) Peter, who used to frame his teachings to meet the wants (of his hearers), and not as making a connected narrative of the Lord's discourses. So Mark committed no error, as he wrote down some particulars as he (Peter) related them; for he took heed to one thing—to omit nothing of what he heard, and to state nothing falsely in his record." (Quoted in Westcott, "Bible in the Church," p. 96.)

3. There is a group of writers of yet earlier date. Of these, one is Clement of Rome (A.D. 95), who has been identified by some with the Clement mentioned in the Epistle to the Philippians. But be this as it may, Clement of Rome is a writer who brings us to the close of the first century and the opening of the second. From him we have an Epistle addressed to the

Corinthians, probably written before the close of the first century. In this we may find in some cases the very phraseology of the New Testament, and, what is more important still, "traces of the presence of each of the typical forms of doctrine which are contained in the New Testament."

In the same group we have Ignatius, who suffered martyrdom in the opening of the second century (A.D. 107). He is the writer of some interesting letters, which breathe his anxiety for the well-being of the Church. In these we can trace lines of thought which seem like the continuance of those commenced in the Epistles of St. Paul. His language is the language of one who is working out the principles which appear to him to be contained in the New Testament.

Lastly, there is Polycarp (A.D. 100), who was the direct pupil of St. John himself. It is no modern fancy which traces a resemblance between his epistle and the First Epistle of St. Peter, which is in our New Testament. In it, too, we find references to the writings of St. Paul.

Such is the briefest outline of some of the facts which have resulted from a careful scrutiny of early Christian writings. It is to be remembered, too, that this scrutiny has not been carried on by those who held a brief for the authority of the New Testament. The investigation of all evidence in connection with the genuineness and authenticity of the books of the Bible has been almost always an investigation in the midst of the fiercest blaze of hostile criticism. Whatever other result flows from the great literary and critical warfare which has raged during the last three or four generations, one thing at least is secured by us—the establishing of facts connected with the Bible upon foundations which are strong enough to bear the weight of our faith. It may be safely said that though the conflict is not ended, and though before it ends we may have to surrender some of our earlier notions, those facts on which the life and strength of Christendom is built are found to have been recognised as facts among the earliest Christian writers. We seem, as

we carry our investigation backwards, to pass through the war of critics and the battle of books, and to find ourselves, as the clouds part asunder and the smoke of battle rolls away, face to face with a Person, on whose life even more than on whose words, on whose character rather than on any philosophy He taught, our confidence may rest. In this search backwards we show as it were a parable to many who seek for truth ; for behind the cloudy thoughts and angry arguments of men, behind the strife of tongues and the exaggerated fancies of teachers and churches, behind even the sweetest and strongest of creeds, we reach Him, who, though the ages have wrangled and passed away, is alive for evermore.

CHAPTER IX.

BIBLE STUDY.

SOME books, said Lord Bacon, are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested. The Bible should be among these latter. It is not worthy of ourselves or of it to skim its pages rapidly, or to read with sleepy and lazy mind. The deeper and truer meaning is for the diligent. In this, as in all else, the hand of the diligent maketh rich. Some suggestions for the study of the Bible may not be out of place.

How should we read it? Shall it be a chapter at a time, beginning with Genesis and ending with Revelation? This has its advantages, and may produce a good surface-knowledge of the Bible, but it labours under the defect of being a disproportionate method; for all parts of the Bible have not the same value, nor do all parts need the same study.

A better plan is to begin with the simpler books, and go on to the more difficult; and following this plan, it seems best to take one book and to master it, rather than to spread our reading over many books, and to lose strength of knowledge in the endeavour to gain breadth. One book well mastered prepares us for the study of another, and makes every fresh book easier to master.

When I speak of mastering a book, let it be understood that I mean mastering it. It is not enough to be familiar with one or two chapters, or to be able to quote some of the more remarkable verses; we must not rest satisfied till we can give a clear account of the drift and purpose, of the origin and use, of the book. It is only by doing this that we shall be able to appreciate the real teaching to be derived from it, and tne true application of its principles to our age and to ourselves.

It is always best to illustrate or exemplify our meaning. Let me take one book, and exhibit the method of its study, which may as readily

be applied to others. Hosea's prophecy may do as well as any other.

Here we have a book in which some two or three chapters are fairly familiar to the ordinary Bible reader, and a few special verses are of priceless value to the religious mind. If we were to question these about Hosea, we should find them ready to quote the tender verses: "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt" (Hosea ii. 14, 15). Or such a solemn warning as—"Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone" (iv. 17). Or the great spiritual principle affirmed in the words, "When Ephraim spake trembling, he exalted himself in Israel" (xiii. 1). Or the loving invitation and promise, "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. . . . I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for

mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon" (xiv. 1, 4, 5).

While none can deny the beauty and force of such words, it is fair to say that a knowledge which is limited to a few such passages as these does not constitute a knowledge of the book itself. And more, we may well remember that each portion of a book receives new light and strength when its relation to the whole is perceived, as the beauty of a graceful column is best perceived when it is in its relation to the temple of which it forms a part. It is so here. The personal history of Hosea, the condition of Israel at the time of his prophecy, the possibilities of good and evil which were in the grasp of the men of his day—all these lend their share of light to every portion of the book. Let us look at some facts. When Hosea began his prophecy, the nation was in comparative prosperity; the dark days had not yet come; Jeroboam II. was on the throne of Samaria.

Material comforts abounded; wine and new wine were in the feasts. But prosperity is often dangerous; self-indulgence is always fatal. "Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart." Corruption soon followed; society became disorganised: desperate efforts were made to keep up the appearance of stability and strength, and to hold together the swift crumbling kingdom. Eagerly every passing help was snatched at: conspiracies, political murders, foreign alliances, were tried as expedients; but the mischief lay deeper: a change of sovereign can never be a substitute for moral reformation, and can never stay the ruin which falsehood and wrong, godlessness and unrighteousness promote. In the not very far distance the overthrow of the kingdom, the humiliation, the captivity, begin to shape themselves in gloomy form.

A prophet is needful for a people in such a case. Lost in selfishness and luxuriousness, yet beginning to feel the pulsations of fear, they need, what all need, a true conception

of God, as of one near to them and understanding them, and most ready to help them. All this the prophet must show to the people, speaking to them with a voice tender unto tears. Such a prophet is found in Hosea. The incidents of his own life have been fitting him for his task. "All chance is direction that we cannot see." The sorrows of this saddest and most touching life are not to be lost: out of the heart the mouth must speak; from a broken heart the sweetest, most pleading words shall pour, full of a tenderness all womanly, and of depth and strength of manhood; for every word he speaks comes charged with the emphasis of his life's sorrow. Hosea had loved, and had married: slowly, as it seems, the conviction stole upon his mind that lightness and falseness dwelt in the home where he had garnered up his affections; then doubt, like a cloud, shadowed everything; he felt no security of love or honour in his house: even his children's faces looked alien. But bruised and broken in heart, the great fountain of his love still flowed towards

the wife so unworthy of his trust or affection: he longed to win back her alienated heart; he devoted himself to the effort to restore her to virtue and duty. Every plan he tried: he tried restraint; he kept her under his own eye: he tried freedom; he left her to follow her own wishes, and taste the bitterness of loveless affections; and all through he was ready to renew the sweet old days of love, and to betroth her to himself once more and for ever.

In his life and sorrow no fitter mouthpiece of the love of God existed then in Israel. In all those pathetic chapters, with their persuasions and expostulations, with their pleadings and threatenings, with their utterances of exquisite patience and longing, lingering love, the whole soul of the prophet finds voice; out of the experience of his own sorrow and changeless affection, he catches a glimpse of that deep, tender, and sorrowful love of God which yearns tenderly and jealously over His children.

Now, does it not become apparent that when we take up the book of Hosea, after having

gained this knowledge of its primary drift, we are in happier mood of mind for understanding it? No one single, true, spiritual principle has been lost to us. We may console ourselves for the loss of any mistaken notions which our ignorant study of it may have left to us by the reflection that we have gained more knowledge of the ways of God. We have at least the assurance that the heart of God was always desiring to devise means by which the self-banished or self-destroyed of His children might be rescued and brought back.

Let any one read this prophecy in the remembrance of God, and of the poor heart-broken yet strong loving prophet by whom God spoke, and he will rise from its study with a heart melted by the warmth of the undying love of God, and with a faith in God which will make him readier and stronger to work in the cause of mercy and lovingness among men. It will give him such a knowledge of the character of God's love, that the miracle life of the Divine Son of God, and the sorrow and forgiveness

which His suffering and death proclaimed, will be not only comprehensible, but (if it may be said with reverence) the natural action of such deep and enduring love.

CHAPTER X.

HINTS ON READING.

THERE are two needful helps to true knowledge: they are intelligence and humility. Without humility knowledge is often but a conceit. Humility teaches us reverence for knowledge: she shows that knowledge is for service, not for display; she fills us with the desire of truth; she drives out the ambition of ostentation. On the other hand, humility cannot afford to dispense with intelligence, which saves humility from mere purposeless drudgery or misdirected energy. True humility teaches us the use of knowledge: intelligence saves us from its misuse. The reader of the Bible, like the reader of other books, cannot afford to dispense with these two helps. It is often for lack of one or the other that mistakes are made. If we approach study with much briskness of mind and quickness of wit, but with a flippancy or

self-opinionatedness, we shall hardly gather up abiding truths or lasting knowledge. A certain devoutness of mind is no loss in any study: it closes the door to egotism or vanity; it helps towards seriousness and candour. But devoutness must not be allowed to stupefy the mind or dismiss intelligence. We must know, or try to know, what it is we are reading—what it means, not merely what our devout imagination wishes it to mean. If we take St. Paul as counsellor in this, we shall not only sing or pray with the spirit and the understanding also, but we shall study with the spirit of humility and intelligence.

The prevalence of this double spirit would be a gain to the world. There are many intelligent people who are a little impatient of the slowness of their devout friends; there are many devout people who are startled and shocked at the quickness and progressiveness of the more thinking. The fact is that the world is made up of two classes—those who feel more than they think, and those again who think more than they feel. The former cling

with tenacity and tenderness to every truth, and every form and expression of truth, which has been helpful to them, and are pained if they are told that even the language in which they have received the truth is inappropriate or inadequate. Such are troubled at every change which seems to threaten the quiet nooks of thought which they have found rest-giving and refreshing. The impatience of the more thinking is perhaps natural, but it is to be deplored. It often makes them speak in a more revolutionary way than they really mean; it tends to divide, and to promote not only misgiving, but misunderstanding. It would be well if those who feel the importance of larger, more intelligent, methods of Bible study would cherish the deepest reverence for the feelings and convictions of those whose whole inner life has been nourished by principles and truths which, even if unintelligently held, are yet life-giving to the spirits of men. A reverent spirit is slow to cast away the supports of the weak. It would also be well if those who have been accustomed to

look only to the nourishment of their heart life and to take no interest in the intellectual life around them would remember that their notions of matters are not complete or final. The world is as a landscape spread before men: some view it from their house-door, and to such the scene from day to day is the same; others, bolder and more active spirits, move from place to place, and every day catch fresh features of the scenery. The same country is seen by all: its beauty and its shelter are the heritage of all alike; but the landscape, which has a sweet monotony for some, has wider and more varying delights for others.

If the stay-at-home student would exercise intelligence, if the more adventurous would use a reverent toleration even for restricted views, some good would result. A mutual understanding of each other's position might arise: the stay-at-home folk might be tempted to scale the neighbouring height, and drink in the bracing air, and survey a more extended country; the strong climber might learn to appreciate the love

which believed that the landscape viewed from the old house-door was sweeter than any which the loftiest heights could give. All would be the gainers, for it would then be recognised that identity of view was not needful for unity of faith, and that fresh aspects of old truths could only serve to bring out the old truths into clearer relief and more assured position. The carping, critical spirit, which is fatal alike to truth and charity, might at length be banished; the banquet of knowledge would be enriched, when each placed upon the board the product of his own field. Every addition would be welcomed; every old and every new gift would be reverenced as of God; the hearts and intellects of men would be sustained: it would be wisdom and delight to—

> "Let knowledge grow from more to more,
> But more of reverence in us dwell,
> That mind and soul according well
> May make one music as before,
> But vaster——"

Intelligence, however, needs to be roused;

and perhaps some suggestions may be helpful to the formation of what I may call habits of intelligence in Bible reading.

First, then, I would say, cultivate the habit of reading with your pen in your hand. The mere perusing, as it is called, of a chapter or portion of the Bible is often of very little use. It is true that there may be some people with remarkably retentive memories, who can afford to do without the assistance of a pen to note what they read. But in any case, "writing maketh an exact man," and it is the spirit of accurate observation which most readers need that their studies may be useful.

The supplement to the pen is the manuscript-book, in which to record what is noteworthy, and this should be not merely a record of what strikes us as remarkable, but of the true subject matter of the passage we have been reading. Let the portion be chosen, not too long, and complete as far as possible in itself; make a brief but exact analysis of the portion on the left-hand page (suppose) of your note-book, and

enter on the right-hand page opposite the results of your meditations on the passage. The two pages, left and right, of your note-book will give you the double results of your study. The left-hand page will be the summary of what you have read; this will keep your mind from catching at pious irrelevancies; it will help the habit of trying to ascertain what the portion really means; while the right-hand page of the note-book will contain the practical thoughts or teachings which spring from what you have read.

A book of the Bible read in this way, with our note-book in daily use, will become a source of growing interest and of stronger teaching. The left-hand page of the note-book will give us at a glance the drift or analysis of the prophecy, or epistle, or history we have been studying. On the opposite page we shall find collected the moral or spiritual principles, the divine truths, and the illustrations which have resulted from our meditation. On the one page we have the results of reading; on the other

the results of thinking over what we have read. And just these two—reading and thinking—are indispensable to true knowledge and true progress in Bible study. The two powers—observation and reflection—receive their due exercise, and prepare the way for wider and more definite prayer ; since the truths, or duties, or principles which we have marked down as the product of our reflection in their turn afford topics of prayer.

To make this method more plain, let me suppose that we have our Bible open ; we have selected our book for study ; we ascertain what we can of the writer, of the occasion when it was written, of the people for whom it was intended : we have noted down these points ; we are in a position to learn something immediately, for the drift of the book is in some measure made clear to us by what we have found out about the writer, and the occasion of his writing. For instance, suppose we had opened the Epistle to the Colossians, we should have discovered that the Apostle wrote with the view of

correcting some misapprehensions, and of guarding against false and faulty notions. We should soon see that the way in which he meets error is by the clear statement of what is true; he does not attack the evil and cast it down, and then retire from the empty field: he builds up the good, so that the people to whom he writes may have shelter for their thoughts. He overcomes the evil by affirming the good. He does not, like the angry polemic, take away food and leave men starving: he supplies the bread of life, which can satisfy the hungry, and which, therefore, removes the desire for the inferior bread. The duty of considering the needs of men is the lesson. Anger with error is often folly and akin to barbarity: we have no right to turn people out of their poor shelter unless we are prepared to give them a better. This is but one thought out of many.

So far we have only been preparing, as it were, for study. We begin to read the book: we mark off the portion which we propose to read, we ask—What does it mean? What is the

sequence of thought? What is the drift and scope? We write down an outline of its meaning: this gives us a clear idea of the passage. Our left-hand page has been written on. Now comes the duty of meditation or reflection. We question the passage we have been reading. What does it teach us about God? What aspect of His character is brought out? What revelation of Himself is seen? What does it teach about some human character? What insight does it give us of the nature we bear? What principles does it exhibit? What duty does it enforce? What bearing has it upon the moving history of the world? What teaching about the relationships of men to one another? What other part of the Bible bears upon the same subject or duty? Questions like these will bring out thoughts which will help the mind and the spirit into the knowledge of God and His ways. Some lesson respecting God, or ourselves, or the Church, or the world is sure to spring out of these inquiries.

Perhaps it is well to be content with some one

lesson at a time, noting it down carefully, and finding illustration and enforcement of it from other parts of the Bible. This one lesson thus gained each day may be woven into our prayers. Each day thus brings its own teachings and its own suggestions for prayer: each day brings us into closer intercourse with the God of our life. He reveals Himself to us: we trace His growing light; we have become more deeply anxious about our needs; we seek more readily for His help; a freshness pervades our thoughts of the Bible; duty and devotion become clearer to us; and our spirits grow into higher and truer unison of thought and feeling with the Father and Guide of the spirits of all flesh.

CHAPTER XI.

INNER TEACHING.

ONE day a mixed company of men of different creeds and opinions were met together: Romanists and Protestants, philosophers and materialists, were there when this question was started —Supposing a man, doomed to imprisonment for life, were allowed to choose one book only as the companion of his solitude, what book should he choose? In reply, all agreed that his choice should be the Bible. The story is told by a French rationalist. It is a singular testimony to the charm of the Bible, and to the confidence which men feel in it as in a companion whose friendship would never weary. The truth is that the Bible does supply a great variety of mental and moral nutriment. In so small a compass one can move through scenes which display all sides of life. It reaches our various moods: its maxims on the conduct of

life, no less than its outbursts as from the depths of the human spirit—its devotional, no less than its intellectual, spirit, meet the wants of our nature. But even the lonely prisoner in his cell must bring a certain aptitude of spirit with him. Beauties are not seen by all the world. Knowledge, and the strength which comes from knowledge, is not the necessary heritage of all who read.

A simple principle which all students should be mindful of is this—*things are to us what we are to them.* When a student at one of our art schools asked how he might gain the power of reading Nature's laws of form, he was answered, "If you look for curves, you will see curves. If you look for straight lines, you will see straight lines." This is most true. There are features in the fields of nature, and among the cities of men, which are only seen by those who have eyes to see them. "He," writes a modern novelist, speaking of one of her characters, a purse-proud ignoramus, "saw everything that was to be seen for his money, tired himself and

his companion to death rather than let cicerones cheat him out of a real, and had not the faintest notion that when he saw dry bones only, other people made the dry bones live." To some the sky above us is a dreary and silent expanse : to others it is a never-ending psalm—

"L'immense hymne etoilé qu'on appelle le ciel."

But the voices and the sights around need the ear and eye fitted to perceive them. This is the truth, which perhaps more than any other men need to remember. Our impatience, our conceit, our self-opinionatedness are so strong: they deafen us with their clamour, and we cannot hear the still small voice, which no tempest can drown, in the ears of the humble ; they blind us to the traces and tokens of God's love and faithfulness, which are written large on all things to those whose eyes are opened by the spirit of loving reverence.

We see what we look for. If our minds are intent on a controversial victory, everything lends itself to our view. If our egotism is awake,

everything flatters. If we are despondent, the merriest bells are melancholy and ominous in their sound. "He that hath, to him shall be given." "With the pure, thou shalt be pure: with the froward thou shalt learn frowardness." "The world does not more surely provide different foods for different animals than it furnishes doubts to the sceptics, and hopes to the believer, as he takes it." The Bible also, it may be said, does not more surely provide grounds of debate to the captious than it furnishes arguments to the controversialist, and guidance and nourishment to the true-hearted. What is needed, then, is the honest and good heart. This is not the sleepy mind which does not understand, or care to understand, what it reads; but it is the meek and humble spirit which seeks to be taught of God, and to have the light of the helping spirit of God shining upon all his studies. It is this which we must seek. He who reads the most sacred pages without the prayer, "Open Thou mine eyes," may see words, and furnish his mind with ideas,

but he will not furnish his heart with truths; but he who prays, upon him the light will shine, and the words will become spirit and life to him: they will become incorporated into his very being; they will work the spiritual invigoration of his character; they will be to him more than his necessary food; they will be sweeter than honey, and, like the honey which Jonathan tasted, they will enlighten his eyes.

If it be, then, true that mysteries are thus "revealed to the meek," it becomes of primary importance that we should read the Bible, not in haste, nor with irreverence, but with minds and hearts earnest and vigilant. Far higher than the debates about inspiration and infallibility, is the question of the moral and spiritual good which we may win for ourselves from the Bible. We have little idea how much we are losing in squandering our days on preliminary inquiries, and asking to be satisfied on this point or that, before we begin to study the Bible at all. If we would but try it, leaving all debated points for the moment in

abeyance, we should find, in the silent and gradual good wrought upon ourselves, a testimony to the reality of those divine influences which are not the heritage of past ages only, but of our own also, and which are not denied to the weakest and most distressed who seek them from God. For if the Bible witnesses nothing else, it witnesses this, that He has never left men alone. Its pages show us God in the life of all. The faith of Noah and Abraham, the bitter discipline of the life of Jacob, the noble heroism of Moses, the chivalry of Joshua, the triumph and the humiliation of David, are but varying witnesses to the same truth—that God is in the lives of men, to rouse their energy, to check their impatience, to educate their characters, to visit their offences with the rod, but never to forsake them, nor take away His mercy from them utterly for evermore.

It is no vain or goody counsel, then, that urges us to approach the study of the Bible with reverence and with faith. It is no spirit which seeks to evade difficulties by sealing up the under-

standing, or silencing the natural or reasonable expression of difficulties. These must always be felt: they need never be stifled. But what is ever of importance is, that we should not allow our criticism of the gateway or the vestibule to keep us lingering in the porch or the corridors: there may be much left that needs explaining, but it is not necessary that everything should be explained before we pass on to the winning of the moral and spiritual help which the Bible can undoubtedly afford. Suppose that we are doubtful whether the sun stood still, or whether Balaam's ass spoke, or the great fish swallowed Jonah—these points do not stay the teaching power of a book, which reveals the pity of God over Nineveh in contrast with the pitilessness of the prophet, and which shows the hand of God stretched out to thwart the wilfulness of Balaam's ambition. The deep, spiritual lessons remain: these surely are worth the seeking; and these once won help our minds up to those heights of moral and spiritual advance from whence we can view, not, indeed, with

indifference, but still without misgiving, the questions which looked so formidable before, but which are now seen to be below the level of the true highway which leads heavenward.

To win these lessons we need sincere hearts. It is when the eye is single that the whole body is full of light. But here, too, is the difficulty; for all who are honest with themselves know how much vanity, and conceit, and self-will thrust themselves in, and mar our best intentions. A regenerating spirit is needed to make impartial and unclouded thought possible.

The same thought is given by Dean Goulburn: The Scripture resembles a sun-dial, which is in itself perfect and complete, graven with all the hours, and with a gnomon which casts an exact shadow. But the indispensable condition of the sun-dial's usefulness is light.

The practical duty which results from this truth is the very simple one of prayer—"Ask and ye shall receive," said Jesus Christ. The illumination of the Holy Ghost is the gift of God, but it is a gift which He gives freely, as a father

gives bread to his hungry child. It is a gift which does not override or suppress the ordinary exercise of the understanding, but which, by purging the motives, clears the judgment, and awakens the truest and holiest desires of our nature. It is with the reading of the Bible as it is with the hearing of sermons. "What," asked St. Chrysostom, "will the sermon profit you, if it is not joined with prayer? 'First prayer, then the word,' said the Apostles." The same counsel falls from the mysterious teacher of Justin Martyr—"Pray, before all things, that the gates of light be opened to you, for the truths for which you seek are not comprehensible by the eye or mind of man, unless God and His Christ give him understanding."

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